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PROGRAM All Things Considered

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SUBJECT Protecting Embassies

SUSAN STAMBERG: The United States has made a major effort to increase protection of its embassies overseas, especially in the Middle East. But NPR's Bill Buzenberg reports that U.S. officials say there are limits to the precautions that can be taken if these buildings are still to be called embassies.

BILL BUZENBERG: Before 1979, anyone could drive up to the door of the American Embassy in Kuwait and most other U.S. Embassies around the world. What happened in Iran, Islamabad and Tripoli made American officials painfully aware that U.S. Embassies were not built to withstand terrorist assaults. Concrete corrective measures were taken throughout the Middle East, and eventually throughout the world: bars on windows, bulletproof glass, heavy iron gates inside and outside. Anti-terrorist - training classes were given to embassy personnel. Today, 15 percent of the State Department's global operating budget goes for security measures.

There's still not enough security. But as the President of the Foreign Service Association said today, only so much isolation can be put into effect. Dennis Hayes said an embassy can't do its job sealed off from behind locked walls.

State Department spokesman Alan Romberg today repeated that message, suggesting terrorists can't always be stopped, even when an embassy, such as the one in Kuwait, knows it may be attacked.

ALAN ROMBERG: The embassy has in the past received several security threats and has tried to take appropriate